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ROUSSEAU ON CITIZENSHIP

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SUMMARY

The present study addresses the question of uncertainty in individual deliberation in Rousseau's philosophy. Accordingly, it intends to consider in a new light his account of virtue and citizenship which cannot possibly be defined as systematic obedience to the general will. Weakness of the will, indeterminacy and prudence have not yet been adequately emphasized, despite some convincing evidence. Chapter XI, book III, of the *Social Contract* on the death of the body politic, for example, prompts us to reconsider the individuals' allegiance to the general will. However, it would be equally extreme to dismiss the core of his thought which affirms the legitimate superiority of the general will over particular desires. Rather it will be illustrated here that, when brought together, these two propositions provide a fruitful way of approaching this ethical issue.

RESUME

Cet article se pose la question du caractère incertain de la délibération individuelle dans la philosophie de Rousseau. Il se propose d'envisager sous un jour nouveau les notions de vertu et de citoyenneté qui ne peuvent pas être définies comme une sujétion systématique à la volonté générale. La faiblesse de la volonté, l'indétermination et la prudence n'ont probablement pas été suffisamment soulignées jusqu'à présent en dépit de certains éléments textuels probants. Le chapitre XI, livre III, du *Contrat Social* sur la mort du corps politique par exemple, nous conduit à reconsidérer l'obéissance des individus à la volonté générale. Cependant, il serait tout aussi extrême de rejeter la thèse de la légitime supériorité de la volonté générale sur les désirs particuliers. Nous essaierons plutôt de montrer ici que, lorsqu'elles sont combinées ensemble, ces deux perspectives permettent d'envisager la question éthique d'une manière très profitable.

CLASSIFICATION JEL B11. B31. D60

MOTS-CLEFS Rousseau Freedom Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The fragile balance carried out by the individual's uncertain choice to act rationally is probably one of the most stimulating and challenging issues raised by Rousseau's thought. Social passions, on one side, and compassion on the other, unpredictably bear on an individual's choices. This article attempted to show that the idea of fragility brought up by Rousseau through the death of the body politic, far from undermining his theory, actually plays a decisive part in structuring prudent practices between rationality and emotions, respectively symbolised by utopia and death, and thus ensures the very possibility of citizenship.

Strongly relying on previous works on history of ideas, this article should not be primarily considered as a historical study on Rousseau and quotations will consequently be kept to a minimum. Contemporary terminology, such as the distinction between an objective and subjective standpoint, will also be used to clarify and open the discussion. In the first part of our talk, I shall consider the issue of individual will and the choice one faces between the inclinations shaped by society and one's moral or rational duty. After exploring Rousseau's theory of individual will, and the role of the law in bringing objectivity and rationality into people's opportunities of choice, I shall then discuss the ethical dilemma introduced by the autonomy proviso, which prevents anyone from adopting a definitive and external criteria of choice (such as rationality or moral duty), and leads to an inherent indeterminacy of individuals' choices. Emotions, under certain political conditions, will, paradoxically, be presented as playing an essential part in driving individuals towards more objectivity and rationality. The fragility of citizenship will then ironically appear as its best defence against free riding.

I. GENERAL WILL, RATIONALITY AND INDIVIDUAL DELIBERATION

The first part deals with the concepts Rousseau puts forward in terms of individual will, preferences and deliberation. This section strongly relies on the interpretation of Rousseau's general will as the individual 'rational' will (Berlin 2006; Shklar 1969; Riley 2001). The general will, publicly expressed by the law, may be defined as the rational and self-regarding will agents would have if put in an independent and objective state, *i.e.* the state of nature¹. A first section will then be devoted to the status of the state of nature in the conception of the general will. Fictions, through an identification process, form part of the rationalisation of self-interest.

The general and the particular will, henceforth considered from an individual point of view, theoretically constitute two alternative choices for an agent. Special focus will then be placed on the function of the law in the process of individual deliberation. By signalling the general will, the law, as will be demonstrated in the second section, urges individuals to deliberate and to question the autonomy of their preferences. I shall argue that citizenship denotes for Rousseau the tendency of individuals to favour the general will over their own particular will.

1.1. Rationality, State of Nature, and Fictions

The first step towards citizenship is paradoxically a logical step back towards a pre-social, or rather an a-social, state where individual idiosyncrasy no longer exists. Social differences, otherwise called moral inequalities because they are subjective and relative, are directly linked to the corrupt competition for esteem or wealth which characterises civil society (Viroli

¹ Is Rousseau a thinker of rationality? Though well documented, this issue remains unsettled. Rousseau's writings have historically influenced two major and irreconcilable German traditions, the Kantian philosophy and the romanticism movement? (Cassirer 1963). Rousseau's writings therefore bear an unconventional variety of different, even opposed, interpretations. The broad array of Rousseau readings can be first related to the intricate issue of his critical contribution to the tradition of the natural right. The outstanding work of Robert Derathé (1948) on the subject largely contributed to clarifying widespread misunderstandings. Derathé remained however deeply influenced by his jusrationalist reading and considered the state of nature on an historical stand which led him to move rather than to solve what he considered to be the weakness or the strangeness of Rousseau's discourse. The inadequate distinctions between reason and rationality, secondly, sparked off needless quarrels.

1988). Just as personal bonds, built upon these comparisons, initiate in men an insatiable need to dominate what eventually subjugates them, citizenship cannot be soundly conceived from an individual's particular standpoint. Moral autonomy, taken as intellectual self-sufficiency, constitutes a logical requirement of objectivity and, subsequently, of rationality.

The objective stance adopted by Rousseau significantly differs from the impartial spectator used by the Scottish philosophers. While the impartial spectator stands as a fictitious companion who, in many ways, is similar to his originator, the objective standpoint described by Rousseau, on the contrary, is explicitly lacking in man's common features. This strictly objective, rational and independent standpoint, reinvented by John Rawls (Rawls 1971), is referred by Rousseau as a state of nature (though it can take other forms as shown below) in consideration of the long tradition of natural right that preceded him, and despite the unusual meaning he conferred to the expression (Derathé 1995).

Three features of Rousseau's state of nature significantly stand out when compared to its previous uses. Firstly, man, in the state of nature, is independent. Dependent on no one, utterly ignorant of other people's beliefs, values and preferences, and never affected by external contingencies, he stands 'as if' he were on his own in an opulent and benevolent state of nature. He epitomises the idea of self-regard. The ideas of otherness, difference and comparisons are indeed thoroughly absent from the state of nature. In contrast with the civil state, Rousseau draws a distinction between a self-regarding and an other-regarding type of self-interest².

Secondly, despite his very limited capacity for reasoning, man acts rationally in the state of nature. Rationality, taken as a moral judgment of an agent's action, does not necessarily assume a capacity or even a willingness to act in accordance with rational criteria. Rationality is here in direct causal relation with self-regard. This has been primarily illustrated in the case of economic exchange (Salvat 2007). Incidentally, the much commented discrepancies between Rousseau's and Hobbes' or even Locke's state of nature denote two different attitudes towards rationality. One considers that the civil state is created by individuals who rationally agree to end the state of nature whereas the other assumes that rationality is a civil

² Rousseau distinguishes in note 15 of the *Discourse of Inequalities* two kinds of self-interest, *amour de soi* (love of one-self) and *amour-propre* (egotism). The first one, unlike the second, is free from any inter-personal comparison (Rousseau 1964b:219). On the Augustinian roots of this distinction see Brook (2001).

feature that emerges from *the idea* of the state of nature. Rousseau's scepticism about man's ability to reason³ is at the very core of his idea of an institutionally achieved rationality. Law, it will be argued in this paper, embodies a rational standard that man is unable to attain by himself.

The state of nature is, thirdly, a thought experiment. It has no historical or genealogical status. One must admit that Rousseau himself adopted a very ambivalent position in the *Discourse on Inequality* by simultaneously asserting the hypothetical status of the state of nature and by giving to his discourse a narrative form⁴. Most of his commentators, with the notable exceptions of Durkheim, Cassirer and Berlin, then considered his analysis of human nature in a historical context. But narratives have another function that genealogically link two different states, they primarily support identification.

In Rousseau's system, fictions play a decisive role in providing individuals with an objective standpoint. Judith Shklar, in her authoritative book, explains the utopian feature of Rousseau's system. Considering the Spartan city and the rural household as his main and though opposed models, she convincingly argues that their object never was "to set up a perfect community, but simply to bring moral judgment to bear on the social misery to which men have so unnecessarily reduced themselves." (Shklar, 1969: 2). The Spartan city and the domestic economy, idealised in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, to which one would add the state of nature, stand as three different narratives of one unique archetype. Each one actually offers the imagination a state of perfect autonomy. The man of nature, the father of the family and the citizen are represented as self-sufficient and unaffected by external opinions and beliefs. Each state is specifically devoted to provide moral and economic independence to its members. Thus,

³ Pierre Force recently outlined a terminological distinction between *reason* and *reflection* which, to some extent, could be useful to distinguish the idea of reason in the state of nature from the activity of reasoning in the civil state (Force 2003). This distinction would then echo the above distinction between love of one-self and egotism. Unfortunately Rousseau never gave sufficient evidence to support this interpretation and, most of all, Force's genealogical perspective is from our point of view a misleading one.

⁴ Victor Goldsmith and Robert Derathé, for instance, in their outstanding and authoritative studies of Rousseau's works, respectively presented self-interest and reason through an evolutionary process marked out by development stages (Derathé 1948, 1995; Goldschmidt 1983). Identifying development stages of reason throughout human history turns out nonetheless to be problematic. In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau actually links the development of reason to external and fortuitous events "that might never have come into being" (Rousseau 1987:59). Derathé, aware of this inconsistency but reluctant to give up his genealogical stance, is led to conclude that "the passage from the state of nature to the civil state, or in another way from a purely instinctive to a rational life, remains the weakest part of Rousseau's system" (Derathé 1948:19, our translation). In the same vain, Victor Goldschmidt, vainly looking for the precise transformation point from love of one-self into egotism, proposed a third and intermediate category, which he incongruously called 'disinterested egotism' (Goldschmidt, 1983, pp.452-457).

Emile's apprenticeship to moral autonomy experienced through his identification with *Robinson Crusoe*, the only (text)book he is allowed to read, *de facto* mirrors the relationship the reader himself is experiencing when reading *Emile*⁵.

But autonomy is an impossible, and most certainly undesirable, state to achieve and one would be seriously mistaken to consider isolation and autarky, taken both from an individual and a national perspective, as Rousseau's political response to dependence (Salvat 2007). It has sometimes been argued on these grounds that Rousseau favoured autarky. This idea must be substantially qualified. Economic exchanges have indeed an adverse influence on men's freedom and equality and should be reasonably controlled to avoid any further depravity⁶. The *idea* of autarky has yet another function. Through an individual's identification with fictional characters, the imagination enables men to reason from an external standpoint. When, furthermore, this figure turns out to be isolated, independent and impassionate, like Robinson Crusoe, the identification actually encourages the reader to reason from this objective, though unreal, standpoint. As paradoxical as it may appear, imagination contributes to rationality when individual reasoning is impaired by socially induced heteronomy.

Instead of being presented as achievable, these mental fictions, including the state of nature, should then be considered for what they actually bring to everyman, the possibility of stepping back from his egocentric and self-delusive life, to reason from an external standpoint 'in the silence of passions' (Rousseau 1964b: 286). The interpretation we want to suggest here relies on the conviction that the state of nature and the civil state should be considered from a synchronic rather than a diachronic angle. Love of one-self, as opposed to egotism, represents the idea of the kind of self-interest one forms in the civil state when considering it from an 'objective' point of view. It will be argued in the next section, that a similar logic applies to both the general and particular will. Thanks to these abstractions, and subsequently the law, men are given the opportunity of appraising the rationality of their will and their interest, to draw a distinction between what is particular and what is general in it, what ultimately denotes their singularity and their common nature.

⁵ We reckon that, in spite of the severe stance upheld in the *Discourse on Science and Arts*, this accounts for his choice of publishing novels alongside essays. *Emile or Treatise on Education*, for instance, can be regarded as the story of the imaginary education of a young man from his birth to his marriage as well as the reader's training to think by himself.

⁶ See, for instance, the economic measures advocated in the *Discourse of Political Economy*, the *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation*, and the *Constitutional Project for Corsica*. For further details Salvat (2007).

1.2. General Will, Autonomy and Freedom

General will has been studied by countless scholars, but one of its most stimulating and penetrating accounts ironically remains the one given by Rousseau's prominent opponent, Isaiah Berlin. He vividly depicts the general will as the most disinterested part of individual will. In the first place, the general will is above all a theoretical concept that should not be confused with a norm. It maintains that the individual will form a theoretical and dispassionate standpoint, referred to as the state of nature, which Berlin rightly associates with rationality. But I shall strongly object to Berlin's inference that, according to Rousseau, being a superior standard, the general will is to be systematically preferred by individuals and that it can, moreover, be legitimately enforced. Berlin wrongly assumes that what is objective could in the same way be referred to as 'real', 'genuine' or 'true'. He accordingly concludes that opposing a real and an actual self, with true though yet undisclosed desires, "is one of the most powerful and dangerous arguments in the entire history of human thought" (Berlin, 2006, 124), and that rationality is necessarily a public feature which can only be shared by individuals through complete obedience to the law.

Instead of differentiating a 'real' from a non 'real' interest, the concepts of the particular and the general will actually sanction the distinction drawn between autonomous and heteronomous preferences. The particular will, which should not be confused with the individual one, refers to the will of an impassionate and socially embedded self. It singles out personal specificities, however real or affected they may be, and subsequently tends to increase social inequalities in which individuals wallow. Subjective comparisons between individuals are, according to the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, inseparable from civil society and its numerous wrongdoings, including the most important of them – the loss of man's original freedom.

The development of social passions, like envy or vanity, induces individuals to nurture a self-delusive idea of self-interest, egotism. When individuals are directed by other-regarding preferences and social norms, exchanges are, according to his analysis, unfair, ineffective and socially harmful. Blinded by self-delusion, individuals are oblivious of the moral and economic dependence they gradually assent to in order to satisfy their egocentric and competitive passions. By supporting and representing deceptive social standards of

rationality, freedom or even beauty, “ordinary men” are misled by their own preferences and interest and subject public opinion to them. In the first discourse, as in the second one, self-delusion hit first and foremost the intellectually, socially and economically weakest part of the population⁷. Conspicuous consumption, such as luxury and fashion, thus represent a collective irrational behaviour that leads to a distortion of agricultural-industry prices which is prejudicial for the poor and the country itself (Salvat 2007). The civil state’s legitimacy is made clear, by Rousseau as by almost all the Natural Right philosophers, by the ultimate necessity of self-preservation he declared, in his hypothetical history of man’s predicament, and if neglected, it would imperil the human species⁸.

The general will, on the other hand, denotes the rational and socially autonomous will of a theoretical self. Considering men as equal, it only focuses on the common features of community members and on the part of self-interest individuals all have in common, self-preservation and freedom. This will is called ‘general’ in consideration of its object, the general or common interest of individuals. For this reason, the general will also expresses the preferences of the community considered as a body politic. The term ‘general’ indeed both refers in Rousseau’s writings to the unspecific focus of the will and to the widespread agreement of the members of a community. Though these two meanings logically overlap, they should not however be confused. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau unmistakably distinguishes the general will from a widely held particular will and states that the general quality of a community’s will is always relative to its overriding position towards lesser ones.

We have presented so far the general will from a sheer individualistic perspective that, though very insightful, left no room for Rousseau’s political philosophy. Reintroducing the idea of the general will as a common interest is now necessary to understand how the community contributes, especially through the law, to individuals’ rationality. We shall not however

⁷ The false pact, instituting political domination by the rich and related in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, precisely relies on the incapacity of the weakest to act on behalf of their genuine interest. Blinded by envy and flattery, unable to master the art of rhetoric, the poor deliberately accepted the loss of their liberty to serve and obey the rich: “They all ran to chain themselves in the belief that they secured their liberty” (Rousseau 1987: 69-70). A similar idea is defended in the *Discourse on the sciences and the arts* where Rousseau rashly states that the sciences, letters and the arts “less despotic and perhaps more powerful” than politics “spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they are burdened”, make men “love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples” (Rousseau 1987: 3).

⁸ “Let us assume that men have reached the point where the obstacles to their self-preservation in the state of nature are too great to be overcome by the forces each individual is capable of exerting to maintain himself in the state. This original state can then no longer continue; and the human race would perish if it did not change its mode of existence” (Rousseau, 1986: 14).

develop here the bottom-up relationship from the individuals' will to the general will nor the related political issues on public deliberation and representation⁹. One will assume here, with Rousseau, that the nature of the law is to express the general will.

By publicly expressing the general will as a rule for all, the law has two distinct goals. It first represents the individual's rational and objective self-interest. Contrasting one will to the other, the social and subjective to the rational and 'natural' one, first implies a capacity to be objective and rational which is a very unlikely, though not an impossible, condition for a civil man. This objective standpoint, without which man could not be free, is however provided by the political institution, through the law. The general and the particular will, considered from an individual point of view, now constitute two alternative choices for an agent: either he acts in accordance with his heteronymous preferences, or he assents to his theoretically autonomous will. But, according to the autonomy proviso, in both cases he will be free.

The republican idea of freedom, defined by Philip Pettit as non-domination (Pettit 1997; Skinner 1998), and which Rousseau takes to its extreme, denotes an ability to autonomously govern oneself whatever the malevolence of others. Unlike the Stoics, freedom is not, for Rousseau, a state where the occasions of dependency (either political, intellectual or emotional) are gradually removed by the individuals themselves, to the extent that deliberating is no longer an issue. It is a state where domination, dependence and heteronomy are successfully brought under control.

Freedom can be defined from Rousseau's works as a morally autonomous state of deliberations where moral autonomy denotes an ability to reflect on one's own will and to deliberately act in the absence of *any* external authority. The deliberation cannot therefore be either predetermined by *a priori* rational or moral criteria of choices. This point, to which we will refer as the autonomy proviso, has been clearly explained by Susan Wolf according to whom choices, whether rational or not, are necessarily equivalent for the free agent (Wolf 1990). The claim we want to make is that Rousseau's idea of freedom entails that the rational standard embodied in the general will never stands as an individual norm. On the contrary, freedom as autonomy prevents individuals' choices from being rationally predetermined, and,

⁹ In a state of contingencies, inner or public deliberations are the best way to get closer to objectivity. But deliberations are not free from mistakes, prejudices or misconceptions. Gathering individuals to deliberate and vote is not a guarantee that the general will be expressed.

a fortiori, from being determined by an external authority. The autonomy proviso arouses an indeterminacy of individual choice that first seems incompatible with the stability of the political institution.

II. CITIZENSHIP, EMOTIONS AND RATIONALITY

This first part attempted to show that the individual deliberation, prompted by the very existence of the law, is inherently unpredictable. Freedom entails free deliberation whatever may be the potential consequences. The autonomy proviso theoretically left all alternatives open but they are obviously not equally desirable. The general will epitomises the ‘good’ choice for both individuals and the community. The ethical dilemma Rousseau is facing results from these two seemingly contradictory imperatives: making the ‘good’ choice while being free to make the ‘wrong’ one.

The second part of this article intends to unravel the intricate ties freedom has with ethics. Citizenship, one will define here as a freely consented ethical way of life, and will be explained as a precarious equilibrium that a good political constitution should be designed to keep in balance. Emotions that the body politic is able to arouse within egocentric individuals, compassion in particular, play a key role in protecting them from themselves. They nevertheless introduce a social and political factor of inequality into the system.

2.1. Fragility of Citizenship

In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau assumed that, historically, wealth and power have been socially accepted as the most regarded criteria of individuation, and that they have subsequently been assimilated into individual preferences. The possibility of a spontaneous agreement, either grounded on advanced rationality or strong ethical commitment, has then been cast out on the grounds that man is allegedly corrupted by society. But, from a theoretical (and to some extent from an historical point of view), one can perfectly conceive an ethical criteria of individuation. Instead of competing for wealth, individuals compete for virtue and therefore shape their own preferences on the general will. Virtue, in Rousseau’s much admired city of Sparta thus relies on the idea of civic excellence

and public distinction. The Spartan city stands, along with the family community, as a utopian model in Rousseau's philosophy. In addition to their heuristic function, emphasizing the society's features, utopias portray archetypes of 'good' conduct. The Spartan city, as a political community, and the family, which Rousseau mentions in the *Social Contract* as the only 'natural' community¹⁰, both represent models of harmony between the community's interest and its members' particular will.

Utopias, however, are not ever to be replicated. If they were, this would demonstrate a complete misunderstanding of his concepts of citizenship and virtue. Because their members are not subject to inner conflict, the family and the Spartan city look attractive in the first instance¹¹ and may have appear as models or ideals to Rousseau's readers. But, as shown by Judith Shklar, they primarily embody a choice between pleasure and private life, on one side, and duty and civil life, on the other. The absence of conflict is actually the sign of an absence of choice rather than a smooth process of deliberation. Civil life, in which we all have to live in, is on the contrary characterized by the free and continuous choice one has to make between our private pleasure and what we know we ought to do, between what Rousseau refers to as the particular and the general will.

Deliberation, as argued in the first part, is at the core of our freedom. But, such deliberation does not necessarily mean inner conflict. Ethics, unlike morality (Ricoeur 1990), is about how much duty can be achieved when one lives happily. Deliberating in favour of the general will cannot, by definition, be a matter of obligation. Besides, individuals never feel fully constrained by a sense of moral or rational obligation, and free-riding, even in the most totalitarian states, is always a possibility.

The nature of sovereignty necessitates that individuals are continuously struggling between their desires and their duties, between what they subjectively assess as desirable and what they recognize as in their objective interest: "As a matter of fact, writes Rousseau in Chapter I, Book II, of the *Social Contract*, "if it is not impossible for a particular will to agree with the general will on some specific point, at least it is impossible for that agreement to be constant

¹⁰ In the *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau conversely states that families originate from a convention. On the different positions of Rousseau and a possible interpretation, see Masters (1968) 165 and sq).

¹¹ The illusion of virtue or happiness they conveyed is rather confusing but is eventually unveiled. Julie, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, after having praised her isolated and domestic life, admits when she dies how unhappy she really was. See (Shklar 1969; Starobinski 1971).

and durable; for the particular will tends by its very nature to partiality, and the general will to equality. Even if this agreement did remain constant, it would be the result not of skill but of chance, and it would be even more impossible to guarantee that it would continue to do so.” (Rousseau 1986: 25-26).

Though expressing the ‘objective’ self-interest of individuals, the law is not bound to be complied on purely rational grounds. Two reasons may account for this. Firstly, as previously explained, an individual’s rationality is impaired by his social passions. Self-deception and weakness of the will, which are ‘naturally’ inherent in man in civil society, prompt individuals to incongruously favour dependence instead of freedom, and this partly accounts for the long history of man’s ill-advised choices related in the *Discourse on Inequality*.

By instituting an authority on oneself, law provides a very useful, albeit not constraining (Rousseau 1986: 26), means for man to overcome his natural weakness of the will. Rousseau’s anthropological conjectures are however secondary compared to the main philosophical argument I referred to as the autonomy proviso. In a legitimate civil state, by acknowledging people’s sovereignty, the autonomy proviso actually implies that, despite expressing their own will, people cannot absolutely assent to the law without jeopardizing its very legitimacy. As a result, one can never be sure of the outcome of the deliberation when individuals are faced with the possibility of voluntarily complying to the law or free-riding. There is consequently an inherent indeterminacy of individual deliberation as far as citizenship is concerned.

The idea of citizenship we want to introduce now denotes the ability of an agent to reach a reasonable balance between his desires and his duties, to satisfy his immediate and social preferences without endangering, in the long term, his own capacity to choose, and to represent himself both as a man and as a member of a community¹². The ethical issue, to borrow Nagel’s wording, is about how to bring objectivity to bear on subjective wills (Nagel 1986: 139).

¹² Citizenship is indeed for Rousseau a matter of identity and self-representation. To act as citizens, men must be aware that they are all equal members of the same community. This is a necessary condition to autonomy and altruism (Rousseau 1989: 249).

This process, that Rousseau calls generalisation¹³ and pointed out by Berlin as a source of legal despotism, turns out to be one of the most intricate issue of his system. In a Kantian perspective, freedom is always to be preferred by the rational agents that Williams describes as ‘committed to being free’ (Williams 1985: 65). But rationality does not, however, suitably account for the motives of individuals. Nor does citizenship, for Rousseau, rely on the strength of a previous and sacred commitment that individuals feel compelled to meet (Rousseau 1986:26). Furthermore, the social contract can hardly be referred to as a previously agreed commitment that historically signals the beginning of the civil state¹⁴. This prompts us to emphasize citizenship as a fragile equilibrium between an individual’s preferences and his commitment to rationality.

Citizenship, we believe, basically features three aspects. First, citizens *tend* to act ethically, but they do not always do so. Free-riding always remains an option for the citizen. The motives of an ethical choice are always *subjective*, and therefore subject to deceit, mistakes or discrepancy. In spite of the legitimacy of its authority, respect for the law essentially relies on the individual’s strength of will, which Rousseau associates with virtue (Rousseau 1969: 818). This trait is, as shown below, emotionally related to the individual’s bonds with their community.

Citizenship is secondly directed by a self-interested incentive, one’s own well-being. Well-being to Rousseau is a theoretical state where the individual’s subjective desires are not in conflict with their ‘objective’ civil identity and their commitment to freedom. It is defined by Rousseau as a unified state of the self (Rousseau 1964b: 510). Unlike welfare, well-being¹⁵ refers to a self-regarding notion of self-achievement, a concept that Sen’s works on ethics recently re-emphasized (Sen 1987, 2002). Unimpaired by social passions and unaffected by

¹³ On the process of generalisation see Riley (2001) and Bernardi (2006: 477 and sq.).

¹⁴ The theoretical status Rousseau gave to the state of nature *de facto* prevents him from giving a likely explanation of the establishment of the civil society of which he eventually acknowledged the logical and historical impossibility. This point, sometimes termed as the autoposition circle, is developed in the *Social Contract*: “The social spirit which ought to be the work of that institution, would have to preside over the institution itself. And men would be, prior to the advent of laws, what they ought to become by means of laws.” (Rousseau, 1987: 164). In the *Social Contract*, like in the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau faces his own contradiction when he tries to embellish his line of reasoning with historical cases that obviously cannot stand up. The way out eventually brought forward, that is the intervention of an ‘extraordinary’ legislator, is in many ways unsatisfactory.

¹⁵ Rousseau significantly distinguishes ‘pleasure’ from ‘happiness’ (Rousseau 1964b: 510). The first, that we will preferably call welfare, denotes a relative and never completed satisfaction of a socially shaped particular will. Happiness, hereafter termed well-being after Williams’ translation of the Greek idea of *eudaimonia* (Williams 1985:34), is the satisfaction drawn from self-achievement and deliberate desires.

external preferences, the general will is assumed to be rational. It is, within the context of the community, the most objective or impartial standpoint one may get on both self-interest and common interest. As a rational and ‘objective’ expression of man’s will, the general will is by definition common to all. The possibility of altruism, that one can only find in the state of nature under the form of compassion, finds support in Rousseau’s idea of the general will. Totally grounded on self-interest, Rousseau’s idea of ethics does not cast out altruism but heteronomy. Heteronomy denotes a state where one’s welfare depends on the other’s preferences while altruism refers to a case where one’s well-being is affected by the other’s situation. The identification of the body politic with a moral person, whose unity is threatened by inequalities, thus prompts altruist choices commanded by self-interest¹⁶.

Citizenship, thirdly, is the *practical disposition* of a man to make the ‘good’ choice in circumstances where the law is silent. This is sometimes called prudence in reference to the Aristotelian tradition¹⁷. Citizenship, as argued before, refers to the habit of making ethical choices. Habits, customs and public opinion, claims Rousseau, convey a long history of prudent practices thanks to which the State has been maintained so far (Rousseau 1986: 58). The next section proposes to question the part played by emotions in introducing into the individual’s well-being a consideration for the political community, and in developing a practical rationality consistent with their moral autonomy.

2.2. Prudence, Compassion and the Death of the Body Politic

The final section of our paper deals with the role played by the community in the individual’s deliberation. We propose here to emphasize the idea of fragility, vulnerability and death associated with the metaphorical status of the body politic. It will be argued that the sentimental link between the individual and the body politic, paradoxically supported by the

¹⁶ This has been clearly stated by Sen who proposed to differentiate three types of interested motives, a self-centred welfare, a self-welfare goal and a self-goal choice in which the possibility of altruism is introduced (Sen 1985).

¹⁷ On the neo-Aristotelian tradition of prudence, see the noteworthy study of Pierre Aubenque, first part in particular, and appendices to the third and fourth editions (Aubenque 2004), and the collective work *Une prudence moderne?* (Raynaud and Rials 1992).

domestic model¹⁸, and the emotion aroused by his possible death has a determinant impact on man's practical rationality.

Despite its obvious limitations, the metaphorical status of the people as a body politic¹⁹, previously brought up in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, has the merit for Rousseau of conveying the idea of its unity and inherent fragility. Man's limbs and limbs of the political body cannot act independently each other without endangering the body itself (Rousseau 1987: 114). The body politic, Rousseau states again in book III of the *Social Contract*, "no less than the body of man, begins dying from the moment of birth, and bears within itself the seeds of its destruction (Rousseau 1986: 96). Claiming the forthcoming death of the body politic may look unduly pessimistic for the author of the *Social Contract* unless it is understood as a self-defeating prophecy.

The fragility of the political institution that ensures every one's equality, freedom and property obviously presents, from an objective point of view, a powerful reason to embrace the general will as a personal rule of conduct. The rhetoric of danger, from the Greek luck to the Italian *fortuna* (Nussbaum 1986; Pocock 1975), reflects Republican literature. Yet Rousseau conspicuously chose to locate the danger within man's choice. Man's responsibility for his predicament is made implicit from the very beginning of the *Social Contract*²⁰ where Rousseau provocatively describes the moral slavery into which humanity fell. Unlike Hobbes, fear cannot, however, play any substantial role in leading man towards (practical) rationality. Firstly because the deprivation of freedom, defined as autonomy, can be experienced as a rather comfortable situation²¹, and since individuals had not even been aware of its lost, jeopardized freedom cannot possibly represent a menace able to influence their choice. The possibility of a feeling of responsibility aroused by the forthcoming dissolution of the State

¹⁸ Despite the great interest of the subject, it is not possible to properly develop in this paper the ambivalence of the image of the father in Rousseau's thought.

¹⁹ On Rousseau's notion of the body politic and its history, see (Derathé 1995: 410-413) and Chapter 2 of Bruno Bernardi's *Fabrique des concepts* (Bernardi 2006: 77-123).

²⁰ "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau 1986: 3). Man's responsibility is also stressed in the very first sentence of *Emile*: "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Rousseau 2003: 1).

²¹ In the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Art*, Rousseau is bringing up his famous metaphor of garlands of flowers over the iron chains to illustrate the pleasant, and therefore dangerous, element of moral dependence: "While the government and the laws see the safety and well-being of assembled men, the sciences, letters and the arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples." Rousseau (1987: 3).

and urging individuals to obey the law is, secondly, definitively ruled out by the autonomy proviso.

It is our contention that, instead of representing a reasonable argument for deliberation, Rousseau brings vulnerability and death into play in order to directly address the individual's natural emotion of compassion²². In the theoretical state of nature, compassion is an altruistic and universal emotion that one experiences, through identification, before the suffering or death of any member of the human species. In civil society, however, it is pretty much limited to within the family. The natural impulse of man is to care about what is close to him in preference over what is distant. It seems, says Rousseau in the *Discourse on Political Economy*, that the feeling for humanity vanishes and weakens as it spreads out around the world (Rousseau 1964b: 254).

The political community introduces an intermediate level between selfishness and pure altruism and acts, to some extent, as an emotional device to control the individual's ethics. Though very critical towards political paternalism, Rousseau's system is nevertheless grounded on a strong analogy with the family and depends on an exclusive feeling towards the community, patriotism, and the 'natural' authority of the law drawn from the domestic model²³. Associated with the idea of the family, the body politic paradoxically embodies the idea of a potential death of the community and urges its members to adopt prudence²⁴.

Grounding citizenship on emotions fails, to some extent, free-riding temptations without affecting the individuals' moral autonomy. Prudential deliberations still remain unpredictable but, overall, they better suit the community's self-preservation. Whatever the consequences for themselves and the community, the willingness to comply or not to the general will

²² On the role played by the idea of death on our emotions, and how these emotions affect our rationality, see Nussbaum (2001). Particular attention should be given to the connection between compassion with altruism and what Martha Nussbaum terms as *eudaimonistic* judgment (Nussbaum 2001: 335 and sq.).

²³ Rousseau draws in the *Discourse of Political Economy* an implicit but meaningful distinction between political paternalism and patriarchy. These two family-related kinds of political administration conflict on one basic point, the source of authority. In the first case, the government cites the authority of the father as grounds to mislead the people about its interest. In the second, conversely, this sacred authority is appropriately embodied by the law, which, by definition, expresses the people's interest. His condemnation of Filmer's system and his defence of a patriarchal constitution thus fully concur.

²⁴ John Dunn expounded a political theory where the idea of the death of the global community, made possible by nuclear weapons, is to play a decisive role in the development and democratisation of prudence (Dunn 1990). A similar argument could be advanced today regarding global warming.

remains entirely the individual's choice. The compassion sparked off by the prospect of the body politic's death acts however as a sobering reminder of their own vulnerability. As noted by John Mason Hope, an individual's contradictions are not to be overcome in civil society but, through a republican political institution, the individual may find a reasonable balance between his social desires and his civil and rational duties (Mason Hope 1989).

The political community provides an indispensable environment for the individual's well-being in civil society, understood as an inner consistency, by contributing to diminish socially related self-deception and weakness of will. Prudence, also called self-command by Smith, consequently denotes for an individual a recurring willingness to make reasonable choices when instinctively leaning otherwise, a disposition to self control and to act in a 'reasonable' way. It can be logically referred to as a virtue in the Republican meaning Rousseau confers to it, i.e. as a strength of will (Rousseau 1969: 817), and represents a basic condition for freedom.

Rooted in the traditional image of the virtuous government by the family, otherwise called the *economy* up to the mid-18th century (Salvat 2006), Rousseau's ethics, however, rely on an arguable idealisation of the family, such as the one in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which the State supports and reinforces to form the very idea of patriotism. Constraining family policies, such as the ones proposed in the *Constitutional Project for Corsica*, are thus advocated by Rousseau despite their strong discriminatory effects²⁵. Rousseau's political philosophy, designed to remedy the shortcomings of the Enlightenment's universalism²⁶, partly fails to free itself from the social and sexual prejudices that the domestic model conveys. It paradoxically proves how a system designed to defend the ideas of autonomy and equality can actually rely on traditional preconceptions of the family as a natural and unequal community.

²⁵ Family policies are doubly discriminating by first excluding from the status of citizenship the ones who do not have a family, and secondly by instituting male power within families (Fraisie 2000).

²⁶ Unlike Natural Right and the Enlightenment traditions, Rousseau considers that the relative standards of ethics and rationality can only be achieved within a community. The bigger the community is, the closer these standards may be assumed to be to the universal standards of natural law. The Nation, large enough to get close to objective standards but small enough to support a sense of identity among its members, unquestionably represents for him the appropriate level of community.

CONCLUSION

The fragile balance carried out by the individual's uncertain choice to act rationally is probably one of the most stimulating and challenging issues raised by Rousseau's thought. Social passions, on one side, and compassion on the other, unpredictably bear on an individual's choices. Citizenship, according to Rousseau's analytical framework, requires three basic conditions for individuals to be brought together, a standard of rationality, freedom of choice and an ethical incentive. The standard of rationality is expressed by the law. If not universal, it is conveniently equally shared by all the members of the community. The non-coercive nature of the law, secondly, guarantees that individuals consciously assent to the above standard of rationality. The political community, lastly, appropriately gives ethical incentives to its members by cherishing an illusion of them belonging to a large family. This article attempted to show that the idea of fragility brought up by Rousseau notably through the death of the body politic, far from undermining his theory, actually plays a decisive part in structuring prudential practices and thus ensures the very possibility of citizenship.

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